

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /075 W
-----038595 241753Z /46

R 241625Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4434
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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AMCONSUL NAPLES
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AMEMBASSY PARIS
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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT IT
SUBJECT: CABINET APPROVES DRAFT LAW FOR EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS

SUMMARY: AFTER MONTHS OF POLITICAL DEBATE, THE COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS APPROVED A DRAFT LAW ON JULY 21 FOR THE HOLDING
OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON THE BASIS OF A
PROPORTIONAL VOTING SYSTEM. UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE
GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL, ITALY'S 81 REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE
ELECTED FROM 9 MULTI-REGIONAL DISTRICTS. THE DRAFT LAW
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ATTEMPTS TO RECONCILE THE DIFFERING OBJECTIVES OF ITALY'S
LARGE AND SMALL PARTIES, IT RECOGNIZED
HOWEVER THAT IT CANNOT "SATISFY EVERY POLITICAL GROUP
FULLY". THE SMALLER LAY PARTIES REMAIN CRITICAL OF THE
LAW'S PROVISIONS AND THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF DOES NOT
EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGES BEFORE
PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL IS OBTAINED. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER PROLONGED DEBATE BETWEEN ITALY'S LARGE (DC AND PCI) SMALL PARTIES THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS APPROVED A DRAFT LAW ON JULY 21 FOR THE CONDUCT OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BETWEEN JUNE 7-10, 1979 (IN ITALY, THEY WILL BE HELD JUNE 8 AND 9). THE DRAFT ATTEMPTS A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE CONTRASTING POSITIONS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES. ITS MAIN FEATURES ARE:

MULTI-REGIONAL DISTRICTS: ITALY'S 81 REPRESENTATIVES ARE TO BE ELECTED FROM 9 MULTI REGIONAL DISTRICTS. THESE ARE (1) VALLE D'AOSTA,PIEDMONT AND LIGURIA; (2) LOMBARDY; (3) VENETO, TRENTINO-ALTO-ADIGE,FRIULI-VENEZIA-GIULIA (4) EMILIA, ROMAGNA AND MARCHE; (5) TUSCANY AND UMBRIA; (6) LAZIO AND SARDINIA, (7) ABRUZZI MOLISE AND PUGLIA, (8) CAMPANIA AND BASILICATA, AND (9) SICILY AND CALABRIA.

PROPORTIONAL VOTING: REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE ELECTED IN EACH OF THE NINE DISTRICTS ON THE BASIS OF PURELY PROPORTITNAL VOTING. UNLIKE THE SYSTEM USED FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS WHICH FAVORS THE LARGER PARTIES, RESIDUAL OR UNUSED VOTES IN ONE DISTRICT CAN BE ADDED TO UNUSED VOTES IN ANOTHER DISTRICT. 668,000 VOTES WILL BE NEEDED TO OBTAIN EACH SEAT. THUS A SAMLL PARTY UNABLE TO ATTRACT ENOUGH VOTES TO ELECT A REPRESENTATIVE IN ONE ELECTORAL DISTRICT CAN USE THOSE VOTES ADJUNCTIVELY TO ELECT A REPRESENTATIVE IN ANOTHER DISTRICT.

PREFERENCIAL VOTING: WHILE EACH PARTY WILL OFFER A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ROSTER OF RANK-ORDERED CANDIDATES IN EACH DISTRICT, THE VOTER WILL HAVE THE RIGHT TO ONE "PREFERENTIAL" VOTE IN THE SMALLER DISTRICTS AND TWO "PREFERENTIAL" VOTES IN THE LARGER DISTRICTS. IN THIS MANNER, EMPLOYED IN ITALIAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS, THE VOTER CAN EXPRESS A PREFERENCE FOR A PARTICULAR INDIVIDUAL ON A PARTY LIST.

ABSENTEE VOTING IN EC COUNTRIES: FOR THE FIRST TIME ITALIANS LIVING OUTSIDE ITALY WILL BE PERMITTED TO VOTE IN THEIR PLACES OF RESIDENCE. THE PROVISION IS RESTRICTED TO ITALIANS RESIDENT IN OTHER EC COUNTRIES, HOWEVER.

COMPATIBILITY OF MANDATE: A MEMBER OF THE ITALIAN NATIONAL PARLIAMENT CAN STAND FOR ELECTION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.

2. IN APPROVING THE DRAFT LAW THE CABINET TOOK INTO ACCOUNT THE DIFFERING VIEWS OF THE VARIOUS PARTIES BUT RECOGNIZED THAT IT COULD NOT "SATISFY EVERY POLITICAL GROUP FULLY." THE SMALLER LAY PARTIES HAD ARGUED STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF ONE NATIONAL ELECTROAL COLLEGE, A SOLUTION

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WHICH WOULD FACILITATE CAMPAIGNING AND THE ELECTION OF
WELL-KNOWN LEADERS SUCH AS THE LIBERAL PARTY'S MALAGOIDI
HO MIGHT NOT RECEIVE SUFFICIENT VOTES IN A REGIONAL
ELECTORAL DISTRICT. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, HOWEVER, (AND
PARTICULARLY THE YOUNGER REFORM ELEMENTS) INSISTED ON
RETAINING THE PREFERENTIAL VOTING SYSTEM WHICH ENABLES
THE VOTER TO EXPRESS AN INDIVIDUAL CHOICE. STRICT PARTY
VOTING, THEY MAINTAIN, WOULD FAVOR ELECTION OF THE PARTY'S
OLD-TIME LEADERS SUCH AS EMILIO COLOMBO WHO WOULD CERTAINLY
HEAD THE DC'S LISTS. A SINGLE ELECTORAL COLLEGE WOULD
MAKE PREFERENTIAL VOTING DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE.
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HOW COULD A CANDIDATE IN LOMBARDY MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN IN
CALABRIA?

4. THE SOLUTION ATTEMPTS TO REACH A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LARGE AND SMALL PARTIES. BY ADOPTING A FULLY PROPORTIONAL VOTING SYSTEM, THE SMALLER PARTIES, AT LEAST THEORETICALLY, WILL BE ABLE TO UTILIZE VOTES THAT ARE INSUFFICIENT IN ONE DISTRICT TO ADD TO THOSE RECEIVED BY A CANDIDATE IN ANOTHER DISTRICT. THE SMALLER PARTIES REMAIN SKEPTICAL AND UNHAPPY, HOWEVER, REPUBLICAN PARTY LEADER BATTAGLIA WAS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL: THE DRAFT LAW HE SAID, IS "AUTHENTIC ATTEMPT TO DEFEAT THE INTERMEDIATE PARTIES." THE SMALL PARTIES FEAR THAT VOTERS WILL ABANDON THEM IN DISTRICTS WHERE THEY ARE WEAK IN FAVOR OF LARGE-PARTY CANDIDATES WHO CAN BE ELECTED. HOW CAN LIBERALS IN EMILIA, FOR EXAMPLE, BE CONVINCED TO VOTE PLI SO THAT A LIBERAL PARTY CANDIDATE IN PIEDMONT CAN GET ELECTED?

5. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT SUFFICIENT TIME REMAINS TO WORK OUT THE BILATERAL AGREEMENTS AND MODALITIES FOR ABSENTEE VOTING IN EC COUNTRIES. HOW WILL THE REGIONAL ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF EACH VOTER BE DETERMINED? HOW AND WHERE WILL THE VOTING BE CONDUCTED? THE PROBLEM IS AN IMPORTANT ONE, FOR AN ESTIMATED 1.5 MILLION VOTERS ARE AFFECTED. SOME POLITICIANS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE PCI'S ORGANIZATION WORK WITH WORKERS IN EC COUNTRIES HAS GIVEN COMMUNISTS AN ADVANTAGE IN TAPING THIS VOTE.

6. IF NEXT JUNE'S VOTE WERE CONSISTENT WITH THE RESULTS OF ITALY'S 1976 POLITICAL ELECTIONS, THE BREAKDOWN OF ITALY'S 81 SEATS IN STRASBOURG WOULD BE AS FOLLOWS:
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DC 32; PCI 28; MSI-DN 5; PSDI 3; PRI 2; PLI 1;
DEMPRO 1; AND RADICALS 1. GARDNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, LAW, ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ROME13566
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780303-0701
Format: TEL
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780727/aaaaawqd.tel
Line Count: 209
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8b2ef96d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1907038
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CABINET APPROVES DRAFT LAW FOR EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SUMMARY: AFTER MONTHS OF POLITICAL DEBATE, THE COU
TAGS: PINT, IT, EP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8b2ef96d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014